DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 420 010 CG 028 499

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TITLE "Double Happiness," Double Jeopardy: Exploring Ways in Which Ethnicity, Gender and High School Influence the Social Construction of Identity in Chinese American Girls.
PUB DATE 1998-04-00
NOTE 18p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (San Diego, CA, April 13-17, 1998).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research (143) -- Speeches/Meeting Papers (150)
EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Adolescents; *Chinese Americans; Educational Experience; Ethnicity; *Females; *High School Students; High Schools; Interviews; Qualitative Research; *Self Concept; Sex Differences

ABSTRACT

W.E.B. Du Bois describes the dichotomy of double-consciousness--living as both "an American and a Negro." Goli Rezai-Rashti extends Du Bois's notion of double-consciousness to include gender. Through the lens of double/multiple-consciousness, this paper presents ways in which ethnicity, gender, and education influence the social construction of identity for three Chinese American girls. The girls were interviewed and observed in their school environment. Specific themes that emerged from the data were: "my behavior depends on whether or not I am in class," "balancing loyalty to family and self is not very easy," and "Asian American Sexuality." These themes were used to examine the participants' sense of "two-ness." Factors which influence the self-perceptions of the three girls presented in this paper are a product of the context in which they work and live, and the ongoing process of redefining their self-identities originates from both public (external) and private (internal) sources. (MKA)

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"Double Happiness," Double Jeopardy: Exploring Ways in Which Ethnicity, Gender and High School Influence the Social Construction of Identity in Chinese American Girls

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Introduction

. . .the Negro is a sort of seventh son, born with a veil, and gifted with second sight in this American world,--a world which yields him no true consciousness, but only lets him see himself through the revelation of the world. It is a peculiar sensation, this double-consciousness, this sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness,--an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder (W.E.B. Du Bois,1903).

There is. . .a need to explain the difficulties of minority female students by engaging in a more comprehensive analysis that situates their lives in the two worlds that constitute their existential reality: that of their communities, and that of society and the education system at large (Goli Rezai-Rashti,1995).

Double-ness, duality, duplicity. Du Bois and Rezai-Rashti write about their sense of two-ness which is a part of their everyday lives, while concurrently acknowledging the paradox of living within a single body. Specifically, Du Bois and Rezai-Rashti are aware of their experiences as minority persons who exist in a world founded on majority white, male, middle-class assumptions. Du Bois's phrase, "ever feel[ing] his twoness,--an American, a Negro[1]" clearly describes the dichotomy which has been, and continues to be, a pivotal realization for people of color.

However, the extent to which their work overlaps ends here. A closer reading of Du Bois and Rezai-Rashti reveals that they do not agree on the variables which influence the self-perceptions of peoples of color. Du Bois believes that Negroes' self-identity originates from others' racialized notions about them. He argues that the seeming paradox of being both American and Negro is possible only because it coexists

[1]In an effort to remain faithful to historical terminology, the word "Negro" is used. Given that Du Bois's societal context and vocabulary were very different than the one out of which I am currently writing, I felt it would be more accurate to use the word "Negro" when describing persons of African American ancestry. In doing so, it was not my intent to insult or support any type of racist ideology.

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within "one dark body." Du Bois's metaphorical use of the word "dark" is a play on words, for it describes the literal darkness of Negro skin and the darkness which many believed existed within Negro psyches. Henry Louis Gates Jr. offers additional clarification regarding Du Bois' writing. Gates quotes a passage which references Du Bois' "veil metaphor"--"and he saw himself--darkly as through a veil"-- when explaining the implications of Afro-Americans'[2] attempts to gain consciousness in a racist society. Gates argues that Du Bois believes that Afro-American consciousness will always be related to white American culture (1989,p.xx). Essentially, Du Bois contends that the Negro "double self" results from a passive acceptance of the way others "see [him]." He argues that the history of the American Negro attempt to achieve self-identity is based on the constant struggle to merge the experiences of being both American and Negro. While I realize that Du Bois uses the term "double-consciousness," I believe he actually perceives the world through "multiple-consciousnesses"--e.g. as a Negro, as an American, as a man, as a scholar, etc. Henceforth, I will often use the phrase "multiple-consciousness(ses)" because it reflects, more accurately, the multiplicity of perspectives which I believe comprise people's experiences.

Rezai-Rashti writes one hundred years after Du Bois and focuses on

[2]When writing about people of color, some authors use hyphens, e.g. Asian-American, while others do not. Some authors also use single ethnic descriptors rather than hyphenated or non-hyphenated descriptors, e.g. Asian rather than Asian American or Asian-American. In addition, some authors capitalize the first letter of ethnic/racial descriptors, e.g. Black, while others do not. The use or absence of the hyphen, the inclusion or non-inclusion of the qualifier "American," and the decision whether or not to capitalize ethnic descriptors have major political and psychological implications which go beyond the scope of this work. When quoting, exact terminology, capitalizations, and spellings used are consistent with authors' works.

multicultural education and the lives of minority[3] female students in Canada. Like Du Bois, she advocates situating people of color in the worlds that constitute their "existential realities." In contrast to Du Bois, however, Rezai-Rashti believes that gender[4] must also be considered when discussing the self-perceptions of women of color (1995,p.92). Rezai-Rashti argues that while antiracism has been mandated in official policies throughout many institutions, gender and gender-related issues have not received the same attention. She states, "there is still no mandatory requirement for anti-sexist education" (1995,p.95). In addition, Rezai-Rashti suggests that the self-identities of women of color are neither static nor dependent wholly on others' perceptions of them. She quotes Marnia Lazreg (1988) when arguing that women of color are actively "involved within the process of adjusting, shaping, and at times, resisting and transforming, their own environments" (1995,p.92). Rezai-Rashti concludes by stating that much of the current educational rhetoric focuses on student empowerment and argues that until the mainly Anglo-Saxon educational bureaucracy more actively acknowledges the diversity of its student population, and commensurately transforms curricula to better mirror the complex interplay of race and gender, practitioners will continue to reinforce status quo perceptions about women of color (1995,pp.95-96).

Du Bois and Rezai-Rashti's arguments have proved helpful in studying the lives of young women of color. I have come to see that the self-perceptions of the girls in

[3]The term *minority* is being used to describe groups that have not historically had access or input in decision making processes. It is important, however, to remember that this term can be misleading. Beverly Daniel Tatum (1997) reminds us that a majority of the world population is comprised of minority people. Students of color comprise 40 percent of the population in the United States (Rios, 1996). According to the United States Department of Education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1993), since 1981, African American and/or Hispanic students have comprised the majority population in central city schools throughout the United States.

[4]For purposes of this study, Joan Scott's definition of *gender*, "the social organization of the relationship between the sexes" (1986, p.1053), will be used.

this study are a product of the context in which they work and live; in other words, influential factors in the evolution of their self-identities can be traced to both public (external) and private (internal) sources. In analyzing factors which influence the self-perceptions of young women of color, I have come to realize that they, like Du Bois and Rezai-Rashti, are in the midst of struggling with their "double/multiple" selves. Specifically, this research explores how ethnicity[5], gender and school influence the social construction of identity[6] in the lives of six Chinese American[7] high school girls. The following questions focused this study:

1. What do Chinese American high school girls want and/or expect of themselves with respect to education and their future?
2. How do Chinese American high school girls perceive others' treatment of them?

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[5] *Race* and *ethnicity* are complex, ever-changing, socially constructed terms. Past literature about race assumed an individual to belong to one of five racial groups: black, white, brown, yellow, and red (Omi & Winant, 1993). While this system was widely accepted in early discussions about race, it is problematic, for it is based on relative physical appearance and does not consider individuals whose ancestry includes multiple racial groups. More recently, the term ethnicity has been employed in lieu of race, to include religious, national, racial or cultural aspects of an individual's identity. A more detailed discussion can be found in *Race, Identity and Representation in Education* (McCarthy & Crichlow, 1993). For purposes of this study Mindel and Habenstein's definition of *ethnicity* will be used, "[persons] who share a unique social and cultural heritage that is passed from one generation to another" (1981,p.5). Like Jewelle Taylor Gibbs and Larke Nahme Huang, I maintain that race and ethnicity are not identical, but often overlap, particularly in the case of Chinese Americans and Black Americans (1989,p.9).

6There is a large body of literature which explores identity formation. For purposes of this study, Stacey Lee's definition of *identity*, "sense of self" (1996,p.2) will be used.

[7]Rezai-Rashti maintains that it is important to remember that "students' existential realities vary greatly in accordance with their social class, location and national origin" (1995,p.89). Like Rezai- Rashti, I believe it is possible to find some similarities within the greater diversity of girls' school experiences. For purposes of this study, *Chinese American* refers to "an individual of Chinese or Taiwanese ancestry who was either born in the United States or who has at least permanent resident status and who is proficient enough in English to be in a regular (non-ESL) class" (Goto,1995,p.2). While this does not preclude the inclusion of first generation girls, this study does not specifically address issues (i.e. assimilation and language acquisition) recent immigrants face when negotiating their lives in the United States. In an effort to eliminate some potentially confounding perspectives, the six Chinese American girls in this study are at least 1.5 generation. In addition, I do not use hyphens, e.g. *Chinese American, Asian American* because this infers that members of these groups have "split identities and [are] somehow not fully American like everyone else"(Yung,1995,p.xi).

3. In what ways does the high school curriculum influence the ways Chinese American girls' come to think about themselves?

Methodology

This was a qualitative, interpretive research study (Glesne & Peshkin 1992,) set within the constructivist paradigm. This work is intended to reveal ways in which ethnicity, gender and school experiences affect how Chinese American girls come to see themselves. Through an inductive process (Merriam, 1988), categories were developed and used to identify broad themes which focused and enriched the analysis.

Conceptual and Organizational Framework

In order to better understand the ideas which undergird this research, the following philosophical and methodological explanations are offered. Since no one approach was most effective in capturing the complexities of this topic, multiple methods were employed because "the flaws of one method are often the strengths of another" (Denizin, as cited in Merriam,1988,p.69). Using multiple approaches also served to compensate for biases which might have occurred during the investigative process. As such, this study employed two research strategies: interviews and observation.

One goal for this project is to reconsider the notion of "stakeholders." In this case, the term stakeholders is being defined to include both the participants of the study and those who control and shape the findings of the research. Like Jill Mc Lean Taylor, Carol Gilligan and Amy Sullivan, I believe that "the girls who participated in

this study [were] at the heart of our voice-centered relational research" (1995,p.9). The resulting research is a product of collaboration and reflects the voices[8] of many. For example, excerpts from conversations between participants and between participants and myself were incorporated as part of the text.

In order to create more complete contexts in which to understand the experiences of these Chinese American high school girls, each participant's analysis is introduced by a biographical profile. These descriptive pieces include demographic information--e.g. age, grade level and fluency in language(s) including English--and my observations about participants' mode of dress, body language, and interaction with others--e.g. teachers and peers, inside and outside of the classroom. It should be noted that the profiles do not follow a formula. Rather, the profiles and subsequent analysis represent a reflection of the extent to which participants were willing to reveal information. Thus, some profiles focus one aspect of an individual participant's life and others on a different facet of their subjects' lives. Participants were allowed to review their biographical sketches, once they were completed. As is common practice, participants either chose or were assigned pseudonyms.

In keeping with the dialogical nature of the research relationship, the data are presented in a conversational manner. Grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss,1967) was used to develop strategies which highlighted emerging themes and explored the ways they related to the participants' lives. The approach used to report and analyze data reflects the collegial relationships established among all stakeholders who were involved with the project.

[8]In *Women's Ways of Knowing*, Mary Field Belenky, Blythe McVicker Clinchy, Nancy Rule Goldberger and Jill Mattuck Tarule realized that " 'voice' was more than academic shorthand for a person's point of view" (1986, p.18). In the process of interviewing women, they recognized that respondents were speaking about "voice" in both a literal and metaphorical sense. The same dual meaning of "voice" is being employed here. Literally, in the first case, actual participants' words from transcripts have been excerpted and included as a part of the text. Metaphorically, this research addresses the second meaning of voice by providing participants with an opportunity to speak out; to give voice to their experiences.

Before going further, a few points of clarification must be made. First, only data that were gathered during the four months I worked with participants were considered for analysis. Next, it should be noted that participants' lives, as well as my own, are dynamic, not static. The process of redefinition is ongoing and directly affects how we come to see ourselves as individuals, females, Chinese/Chinese Americans and Asian Americans. Finally, the thoughts presented here are only the beginnings of what the girls and I have come to understand about the ways ethnicity, gender, and school influenced the social construction of their self-perceptions. As these writings are based on our interpretations, I know that what is offered does not describe completely the complex and constant changes which are a part of the evolution of the girls' self-identities.

Like Rezai-Rashti, the girls in this study were aware of their experiences as minority women who exist in a world founded on majority white, male, middle-class assumptions. The following presents a sample of our nascent understandings of how ethnicity, gender and high school influence the way three of the six Chinese American high school girls come to see themselves. In particular, the analyses will highlight some of the themes which have emerged in examining participants' sense of two-ness.

Profile #1-Courtney

> *As a kid, I played sports all the time. I was a real tomboy...I still love to play volleyball, basketball, badminton, tennis and racquetball.*

Courtney, at 5 feet 4 inches, and approximately 115 pounds, was quite slender. In part, this might be explained by her longstanding participation in athletics. Courtney's passion for sports owed no little to the fact that she was the only daughter and youngest child of four brothers. Early in her youth, Courtney realized that if she wanted to earn the respect of her brothers, she had to demonstrate her athletic

proficiency and sportsmanship. In her first interview, Courtney confessed that she had always enjoyed playing a variety of sports--for example, basketball, volleyball and badminton. A number of times throughout her first interview, she described her younger self as a "tomboy." Courtney was a seventeen-year-old sophomore at Green High School.

Analysis: My Behavior Depends on Whether or Not I Am in Class

Courtney was a self-proclaimed tomboy. As the only daughter and youngest child in a family with four older brothers, Courtney said that she honed her athletic skills as a way to gain the respect of her siblings. Courtney believed that the confidence she developed on the playing field helped her become a stronger individual and a student. While I can attest to the first part of her statement, I reserve judgement regarding the second half of her statement.

In observing Courtney, it was evident that she was well liked by her peers. As we traversed the halls and stairwells between classes, Courtney was greeted and hugged by many fellow students. During her lunch period, Courtney played cards with eight other students. The ease with which she assumed her turn as the dealer, combined with the rhythm of her joking and shuffling of the cards, spoke to her leadership role within the cohort.

In contrast, Courtney was very passive in the classroom. Most of the time Courtney worked quietly, taking notes and listening to what was being said by the teacher and her classmates. Not once throughout the day, when answers were elicited from the students, did Courtney volunteer a response. However, when a teacher asked Courtney a question directly, she responded with the correct answer. It was particularly interesting to note that Courtney responded in a soft, childish, barely audible voice.

The contrast in Courtney's behavior inside and outside of the classroom is not out of the ordinary for teenagers. For many, adolescence is a time of great change--physical, emotional, social, spiritual. Thus, their behavior and moods can fluctuate wildly. Courtney's dual personnae are especially worth considering, for they speak to the range of experiences of individual Chinese Americans as well as of the Chinese American population. Unfortunately, much of this difference gets overlooked for Chinese American students are expected to succeed academically and in other areas of their lives because they continue to be perceived as members of the model minority. The consequences of this stereotype are particularly detrimental because they overlook the struggles and the achievements of individuals and establish expectations which do not allow for different definitions of success and personal satisfaction.

Profile #2-Susan

> *I want to be normal like other kids. American parents let their kids hang out with their friends after school, go shopping, sleep over at each others' houses, go on dates with lots of other boys. But Chinese parents, my parents, don't approve of that.*

At our first meeting, Susan extended her hand and introduced herself in a confident, clear, and self-assured voice. The straightness with which she held her approximately 5 feet 4 inch matronly physique and her ability to look me square in the eye led me to assume that she was a self-confident upperclassman. Susan was casually but neatly dressed in a tan ski jacket, blue T-shirt, blue jeans and tennis shoes. Her hair was cut in a below-the-chin-blunt style with bangs which were pushed to the side, and her eyes were framed with pale pink plastic eye glass frames. Susan was eighteen years old and a senior in Green High School.

Analysis: Balancing Loyalty to Family and Self Is Not Very Easy

Our first interview led me to believe that Susan was a very devoted, selfless daughter. She stated that she went home from school each afternoon and cleaned, cooked and waited for her mother to return from work. Susan repeatedly expressed that the greatest satisfaction in her life was knowing that she was contributing to the happiness of her parents. When Susan spoke about her goals for the future, she said that she hoped to "get a good job, get married, live in a nice house, and have two children" and insisted, twice, that she did not have a boyfriend. Moreover, because her parents disapproved of her dating during high school, she said she did not plan on getting into a relationship until her sophomore or junior year in college

Thus, it came as quite a shock to observe Susan walking hand in hand with a young man one day afer school. During our second interview, later in the week, Susan apologized profusely for lying to me about her boyfriend. She admitted that she did not admit to their relationship because she did not know if I could be trusted. Susan confessed that she had been seeing this young man for over five years and hoped some day to marry him.

To my mind, Susan's life was a clear-cut example of a person who literally lives a dual existence. Susan convinced herself that it was acceptable to have a boyfriend as long as her parents did not know, and that the relationship did not negatively impact her grades or her home responsibilities. Susan's decision to live a double-life allowed her to respect her parents' feelings, yet remain true to her own feelings. Susan felt that as long as she was both loyal to her parents and true to herself, the divorce between her school (public) life and her home (private) life was one with which she could live.

Susan's struggle to resolve the duality of the demands of her parents with her own desires is not unique; the tensions many Chinese American girls face in struggling

to appease both their parents and themselves may very well impact their performance in the classroom.

Profile #3-Alli

> *I don't think about the title 'American.' It's just something I am because I was born here and I've learned that 'American' doesn't really have a definition, so I don't use it.*

My introductory telephone conversation with Alli was a memorable one. In describing myself, I said that I was a "thirty-five-year old Chinese American, about 5 feet tall, with shoulder length black hair." Alli replied, "Oh you won't miss me. We're about the same height but I've got this blond streak in my hair. You'll know who I am." Alli was 5 feet tall with a sturdy, almost stocky build. Like many other teenagers, she wore baggy pants with frayed hems that had dragged on the ground. Alli's footwear, like her pants, appeared equally comfortable--on one occasion, dark suede lace up oxfords; another time, well worn black leather boots. Alli was sixteen years old and a junior.

Analysis: Asian American Sexuality

For public consumption, female Asian sexuality is typically presented in the form of one of two personnae: the sexy, ruthless prostitute as exemplified by the Suzie Wong and/or the Dragon Lady characters, or the asexual, loyal, servile character such as Mrs. Livingston from the television show, "The Courtship of Eddie's Father." Assuming that these two images are very much a part of the public's consciousness, then one wonders how extensively they influence the lives of Asian American teenagers today? Specifically, as Alli revealed that she had a crush on a female classmate, I pondered what impact these streotypes had on Alli's sense of her own burgeoning

sexuality.

While I hesitate to generalize too much from only two interviews and one observation, it was clear that Alli felt ambivalent about her bisexuality. On the one hand, she believed it would be easier to "get married to a guy, have a few kids and have a great family and career. . .because that's what everyone wants me to do." On the other hand, Alli also admitted that she got very "excited when one of her female friends intimated that she looked 'really good' in a skimpy black T-shirt" that she happened to be wearing. The conflict expressed in Alli's statements about her future and her sexuality is in keeping the experiences of many individuals who have acknowledged homosexual or bisexual impulses in themselves. However, I think Alli's sexual dichotomy warrants consideration, for in addition to societal pressures, she must also address cultural expectations.

The duality Alli faces is particularly important when considering the social construction of self-identity in Chinese American girls, for her experiences made clear that Asian American teens have sexual feelings and that they must address both larger societal (public) pressures as well as cultural (private) expectations when dealing with their responses to these feelings.

Summary

To review, Du Bois describes the dichotomy of double-consciousness--living as both "an American and a Negro." Rezai-Rashti extends Du Bois's notion of double-consciousness to include gender. Through the lens of double/multiple-consciousnesses, this paper presents ways in which ethnicity, gender and education influence the social construction of identity for three Chinese American girls. Specifically, themes which emerged from the data: "My Behavior Depends on Whether or Not I Am in Class," "Balancing Loyalty to Family and Self Is Not Very Easy," and "Asian American

Sexuality" were used to examine participants' sense of two-ness. Factors which influence the self-perceptions of the three girls presented in this paper are a product of the context in which they work and live; the ongoing process of redefining their self-identities originates from both public (external) and private (internal) sources.

Significance

Contributors to the literature on the education of Asian Americans suggest the need to document the diversity within this population (Goodwin, Genishi, Asher & Woo, 1997; Hsia & Hirano-Nakanshi, 1995; Nakanshi & Nishida, 1995; Pang, 1995). A goal for researchers in this field is the inclusion of multiple perspectives, yet the myth continues to persist throughout America that Asian Americans are, uniformly, a "model minority" (Chun, 1995; Flynn, 1991; Gibson, 1988; Goto, 1995; Lee, 1996; Pang, 1995; Reglin & Adaas, 1990; Sue & Abe, 1995; Sue & Okazaki, 1995; Suzuki, 1995; Walker-Moffat, 1995). This perception subsumes all Asian Americans under one homogenous label, and underscores the group's outsider position in American society. In the case of Chinese Americans, this is particularly relevant, for they began immigrating to the United States over one hundred and fifty years ago, yet they continue to be perceived as "strangers from a different shore" (Takaki, 1989).

The findings of this study will add to the discourse which focuses on gender, ethnicity and education. By including previously overlooked variables, educational researchers better situate themselves to reexamine established educational theories. Furthermore, in using multiple lenses to look again at long-standing assumptions, researchers are presented with the opportunity to nuance their understandings about gender, ethnicity and high school and their impact on the identity construction of Chinese American girls.

It is hoped that the conclusions of this research will influence teacher training,

curricular choices and pedagogy in two ways: first, through the creation of learning environments which celebrate and encourage the individuality of all students; and second, by better preparing teachers and students to critically examine their cultural legacy as studied through the educational experience.

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